

MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

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July 16, 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: NSC Meeting on the Middle East and South Asia

Date and Place: Friday, July 16, 1971, in the Conference Room at San Clemente

Participants: The President
Secretary of State, William Rogers
Deputy Secretary of Defense, David Packard
Admiral Thomas Moorer, Chairman JCS
Richard Helms, Director of Central Intelligence
U. Alexis Johnson, Under Secretary of State
Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President
Brigadier General Alexander M. Haig, Jr., Deputy
Assistant to the President
Joseph J. Sisco, Assistant Secretary of State
Harold H. Saunders, NSC Staff

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The President opened the meeting by pointing out that there are enormous risks in the situation in South Asia for our China policy. There are risks for the Indians and Pakistanis, too. He suggested that the discussion begin with the Middle East and then turn to a briefer discussion of South Asia. That is one problem that must be watched very closely. The Indians are stirring it up. If they mess around on this one, they will not find much sympathy here.

The President then asked Mr. Helms to brief on the situation in the Middle East. [The substance of Mr. Helms' briefing is attached.]

At the conclusion of Mr. Helms' briefing, Secretary Rogers said that State had just gone through another extensive review of the military balance in the Middle East with the Defense Department and concluded that the balance still remains slightly in favor of the Israelis. Mr. Sisco expanded on this point by noting that the Israelis define the military balance as one which gives them a margin of advantage. There is no question that it is impossible to recreate the conditions of 1967 in which the Israelis were able to win an overwhelming victory. Now, although the qualitative advantage remains on Israel's side, what the Russians have done to improve Egyptian defenses is impressive. In assessing what equipment Israel needs, it is the old question: How much is enough to deter?

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Mr. Helms referred to the statement by Senator Jackson that the military balance had shifted. He pointed out that Senator Jackson had based his statement on the ratio between numbers of aircraft. That is not the important thing. The important thing is the number of pilots. Whereas the Israelis have three pilots for every plane, the Egyptians have one pilot for every three planes.

Mr. Packard said that, in addition to the aircraft balance, it must be remembered that the US has given Israel the best electronics counter-measures equipment it has. While the Egyptians have received new equipment from the Soviets, the Israelis are significantly better than they were a year ago.

The President summarized by concluding that the margin is closer.

Mr. Packard said that the big change had taken place when the Soviets moved missiles into the UAR. The situation would never get back to the way it was before that development.

The President asked Admiral Moorer what he thought. The Admiral replied that if Israel has to operate inside the UAR missile envelope, its losses would naturally be greater than prior to the existence of that envelope. Still, the Israelis enjoy qualitative superiority over the UAR air force. The Admiral noted that Israel is now producing its own Jericho surface-to-surface missile. The Admiral noted that the new planes the Soviets were providing to the Egyptians were suitable primarily for air-to-air combat and the UAR ratio in aircraft is superior, but the Israeli pilots are better.

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The President asked, "Where does that leave us?"

Secretary Rogers said that, as a result of Mike Sterner's conversations with President Sadat, we believe President Sadat wants the US to continue playing a role in the negotiation of an interim canal settlement. In addition, President Sadat sent word [redacted] that he still 25X1 wants a Canal settlement. The Secretary proposed that Mr. Sisco go to Israel to attempt to narrow the gap between the Egyptian and Israeli positions on an interim settlement. He said that Israel would "favor" a visit by Mr. Sisco. He hoped that such a trip would permit a narrowing of the gap

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between now and September when the UN General Assembly will be the meeting point for a number of Foreign Ministers from the area. Then, hopefully, there could be an agreement by the first of the year.

The Secretary continued that Mr. Sisco would not be authorized to make commitments on aircraft, but he would be authorized to discuss the Israeli view of their requirements. He would report back to the President and then we would see where we go next with the UAR.

The Secretary continued that President Sadat said that there is some flexibility in his position. He also had said, with regard to the Soviets in the UAR, that he is prepared to have the Soviets withdraw from the SAM sites, but he will continue to need Soviet pilots to train his own pilots. As far as whether we should resume discussions with the Russians is concerned, President Sadat has said that he has no objection to our talking to the Russians "at the proper time." The Secretary concluded with the recommendation that Mr. Sisco go to Israel, try to narrow the gap and make no commitments on aircraft.

The President reiterated the Secretary's proposition that Mr. Sisco take the trip to Israel, return and report to the President and then see whether to go on to deal further with the UAR. He said that we did not want to get into a position where we would trigger a confrontation for which we do not have an answer.

The President went on, saying, "I have a thought." This is July 16. The Congress will be out of play for the best part of August. He interjected that we are not going to have a policy governed by a domestic opinion, but we do have "more running room" when Congress is out of session, particularly on the aircraft question. Then he asked Mr. Sisco how long he thought the discussion in Israel would take.

Mr. Sisco replied that he thought about a week, but he could spend 10 days. He agreed that this is not the time for a confrontation with the Israelis. That time will come, perhaps in September when we know more precisely what kind of agreement might be possible and what kind of concessions we might seek from Israel. Some of the issues involved are:

--Are the Israelis willing to buy a symbolic Egyptian military presence in a narrow strip east of the Suez Canal?

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--Is a zone of Israeli withdrawal possible where the key passes to the Sinai are neither in Egyptian nor in Israeli hands?

--Is it possible to achieve a relatively open-ended ceasefire?

--What can be done with regard to passage of Israeli ships through the Suez Canal?

Mr. Sisco continued that we have to be sympathetic--and to show sympathy--in meeting Israel's concern about arms. Still, it is difficult to respond to the Israeli requests without destroying the one diplomatic thread still in play. However, we should adopt a sympathetic posture on arms and on an interim settlement. Both sides have put forward some interesting propositions.

The President recapitulated by confirming that Mr. Sisco's thought was that Mrs. Meir would talk about arms and Mr. Sisco would talk about a settlement.

The President then said that we had to put this into the context of the "announcement last night" [that the President would visit Peking]. We do not want to have a fight develop with the Israelis now. That would overshadow the China announcement. So it is very important to schedule the trip to Israel so that Mr. Sisco would still be talking when Congress gets out of town.

The President said he knew how "this lobby" [Zionist] works. There is George Meany; there is the group in New York; there is Senator Jackson; and Senator Muskie has to get back on this issue since he is "hurting for money." Israel plays a shrewd, ruthless political game. They will egg on the Presidential hopefuls as well as their usual friends (like Congressman Celler). The President said he saw this blowing up into strong Israeli pressure. The argument would be that we are allowing the Russians to fish in troubled waters.

Turning to the USSR, the President said that if one puts oneself in the Soviet position, one would be concerned about US initiative toward China. The Soviets will be looking for places to irritate the US. They may send some nuclear submarines back to Cienfuegos.

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The President said that, with regard to Mr. Sisco's trip, he would like "a very low-profile." Rather than go out to Israel the first of the very next week, the President suggested that Mr. Sisco go out the following week and then stay there until Congress gets out of town.

The President then said, "Don't promise a damned thing. This is not going to be a free ride this time. From now on it is quid pro quo."

The President reiterated that the visit should be low profile, that Mr. Sisco should be conciliatory on the question of Israel's arms needs, but on the other hand, firm about the need for some diplomatic progress. Then Mr. Sisco would come back and report in Washington. Then we would see whether he would go on to the UAR later in August. At that time we could decide whether it was useful to do anything with the Russians. We have been careful not to bring in the Soviets again, although the Russians would like to play a role. We don't know what kind of role they would like to play--whether they would like to mess the situation up or what.

Mr. Sisco said that, looked at from the Mid-East viewpoint, the advantage of the trip would be to keep negotiations alive until mid-September when the UN General Assembly meets. We know what a reasonable settlement on the Canal would look like. At that time--mid-September--in the context of the Secretary's bilateral talks with Foreign Ministers at the UN, the US could make a major effort to force a final interim settlement. But this would have to be done carefully since Israel has said that it does not want the US and the Russians making that settlement.

Secretary Rogers said that this trip would be an effort to "keep the ball in play." President Sadat wants the US to show it is still active.

The President asked when we have to make the decision on arms for Israel. Mr. Sisco replied that he would be testifying before the Symington sub-committee the following week and that he would simply say that he had been authorized to discuss this issue in Israel. Mr. Packard said that he felt the decision should be put off another month or two. The President said that August would be a good month for holding off.

Mr. Sisco said that we could do this consistent with our diplomatic efforts. Domestic pressure might build up, since the Israelis seem to have a case on the merits--that is, the changing military balance.

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Dr. Kissinger said that the military balance shifts against Israel when the Israelis can no longer win a war quickly. The Arabs do not have to defeat them; they just have to engage Israel in a prolonged war of attrition.

Dr. Kissinger continued that we have all agreed that at some point we would have to squeeze Israel. The issue is whether we squeeze in making a commitment to provide aircraft or at the time of delivery. If we squeeze in making the commitment, Israel will look at everything in terms of on-going pressure.

Secretary Rogers said, "We can wait a couple of months."

The President said that for the UAR the fact that Mr. Sisco was going to Israel should be enough. He suggested that Mr. Sisco leave around July 26. Secretary Rogers said that the trip can be announced before President Sadat's July 23 speech. The President said Mr. Sisco could tell the Symington sub-committee on Monday and that would get the word around. He acknowledged that there has to be an "appearance of motion."

* * * * *

The President then turned the discussion to South Asia. With a smile, he asked Dr. Kissinger, "Did you really have a stomach ache?"

Secretary Rogers said that the press thinks it is so smart but it was certainly gullible to assume that if Dr. Kissinger had had a stomach ache he would have driven four hours to have a special lunch with General Hamid.

The President started out by saying that the purpose of the discussion was to get the South Asian situation into perspective. For obvious considerations, he said that he would have to be personally involved. First, he said that it is imperative that the Pakistanis, if possible, not be embarrassed at this point. He said that we could ask them to do what they can on the refugees. Second, he said that he had talked to Ambassador Keating. He had noted that world opinion is on the side of the Indians and they may be right. However, they are "a slippery, treacherous people." He felt that they would like nothing better than to use this tragedy to destroy Pakistan." In any case, they have built a heavy press campaign against the US. But now intelligence reports show that they are developing a capability to "ramble around" in East Pakistan. He felt that if the Indians believed that they could get away with it they would like to undercut the Pakistani government.

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The President asked what restraints could be applied to the Indians. He acknowledged that he has "a bias" on this subject. But under no circumstances would they get a "dime of aid, if they mess around in East Pakistan." He said that we could not allow--over the next three-four months until "we take this journey" to Peking--a war in South Asia if we can possibly avoid it.

The President asked whether the government of Pakistan would fight if they were attacked. Mr. Helms replied, "Yes." Admiral Moorer said he felt that the Pakistanis would not attack India.

Mr. Helms noted that the pressures are building in India to go to war. The President said that the situation "smells bad." The Indians are not to be trusted.

Dr. Kissinger said he agreed that the Indians seemed bent on war. Everything they have done is an excuse for war. Their claim to have been deceived in State on our arms policy looks like an alibi to go to war. Whatever their objective might ostensibly be, they appear to be thinking of using the war as a way of destroying Pakistan. Dr. Kissinger said that he believed that if East Pakistan were attacked, President Yahya would start an all-out war. He would lose it.

The President asked what the Chinese would do.

Dr. Kissinger said he thought the Chinese would come in. He said that the Indians are "insufferably arrogant." The army chief of staff, General Manekshaw, said that India would take on East Pakistan, West Pakistan, and China, all at once. He said that it was his impression that if we do not "over-power the question of war, India would slide into it." The way that they are hooking a refugee solution to an overall political solution suggests that they are using the refugees for political purposes.

Dr. Kissinger continued that he does not feel that President Yahya has the imagination to solve the political situation in East Pakistan in time. Over a longer period, 70,000 West Pakistanis are not going to hold down East Pakistan. So our objective should be to start some historical evolution which will lead to the inevitable outcome in East Pakistan. But that is not going to happen tomorrow--it will not happen in time to achieve a refugee settlement and to head off an Indian attack. Therefore, he had urged President Yahya to come with the most comprehensive possible refugee package.

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The President interjected that President Yahya is not a politician.

Dr. Kissinger said that he had urged President Yahya to come up with a generous settlement on the refugee issue so that India would lose that card as an excuse for intervention. He concluded that if there is an international war and China does get involved, everything we have done [with China] will go down the drain.

Secretary Rogers said that, as far as he could tell, India is doing everything it can to prevent the refugees from returning. Dr. Kissinger replied that if we kept publicizing a reasonable program for the return of refugees, it would be more difficult for the Indians to go to war on that issue..

Mr. Sisco said it is important to get an international program on the refugees moving. He said that he had told Ambassador Jha that India is in an untenable position. He said that it is important for India to come up with a well-orchestrated program.

Mr. Helms commented that, in the meantime, the Pakistanis are going broke. Mr. Johnson interjected that the Pakistanis face a major famine in East Pakistan.

Secretary Rogers interjected that the tragedy is that Pakistan as presently constituted cannot survive.

The President, changing the subject, said that he was going to brief the legislative leaders on Monday on his China policy. He proposed to tell them nothing of the substance of the exchanges with Chou En-lai. And he would also have a Cabinet meeting to do the same thing.

Dr. Kissinger said that he had backgrounded the press on his visit to Peking but that he had not gone into the substance of the exchanges with Chou En-lai. He had simply provided the rationale for the trip.

The President said that the press would speculate on the impact of his announcement on China for Vietnam policy, South Asia, Japanese policy, effect on Taiwan and the USSR.

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Dr. Kissinger noted that silence on our side was important because the Chinese had already suffered a great deal of anguish over maintaining the appearance that they are not colluding with us. The best line we can take is that we want friendly relations with everybody.

Admiral Moorer, on a separate issue, said that Senator Stennis had asked him to tell the President that he has gone as far as he can go on the draft bill. Senator Stennis felt that Senator Mansfield is the key and that he is on the verge of coming along if somebody could just approach him.

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Harold H. Saunders

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CIA BRIEFING

Following is the substance, not a transcript of Mr. Helms' briefing at the NSC on July 16. He began by saying he would concentrate on Soviet military shipments to the Arabs. He made these points:

I. The Soviets began to increase greatly their military involvement in the Middle East in 1970. That year saw a sharp change in the character of Soviet military aid to Egypt and an acceleration in deliveries of military hardware to Syria.

II. Soviet deliveries to Egypt since the signing of the Soviet-Egyptian Friendship Treaty appear to be part of a continuing series of deliveries that began following the cease-fire of last August, rather than a result of the Treaty itself.

A. Deliveries since May have included 16 MIG-21 fighters.

B. In addition, 16 MI 8 helicopters were delivered to Egypt during June. Also, we have an unconfirmed report of the arrival in July of two large MI-6 helicopters, the first since the early 1960s. The continuing deliveries of helicopters probably are designed to develop an Egyptian heliborne troop-carrying capability.

C. As for Syria, deliveries of Soviet aircraft have increased considerably in recent months. Since late May four SU-7 fighter bombers, 27 MIG-21 fighters, and 13 MI-8 helicopters have arrived. These deliveries--the first since December 1970--have probably stemmed from an arms agreement signed in February of this year.

D. Deliveries of ground combat equipment to both countries since May have been at a relatively low level.

1. The only identifiable items of general equipment have been trucks, shop vans, and similar support equipment.

III. If we look at Soviet deliveries since the cease-fire went into effect last August, the picture of Soviet aid becomes more impressive.

A. For instance, when we add the 16 MIG-21s that have arrived in Egypt since May to those already delivered since the cease-fire, the total comes to 98.

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B. Likewise, the 16 MI-8 helicopters that arrived in Egypt during June boost the total of such aircraft delivered since the cease-fire to 65.

C. In Syria, the total figures since the cease-fire are also markedly higher. From August to December 1970, Syria received 11 MIG-21s and 17 MIG-17s--bringing the total since the cease-fire to 38 MIG-21s and 17 MIG-17s, and four SU-7 fighter-bombers.

D. All the SU-7 fighter bombers delivered to Egypt and Syria since the cease-fire have arrived since the Friendship Treaty was signed.

E. Deliveries of Soviet ground forces equipment since the cease-fire have not been unusually high in either Egypt or Syria.

1. Major equipment delivered to Egypt since August 1970 includes some 130 medium tanks, about 200 armored personnel carriers, and 150 artillery pieces. In addition, the first FROG-7 rocket launchers were identified after the cease-fire, but it is not certain when they were delivered.

2. Identifiable deliveries of ground equipment to Syria since August 1970 have consisted of about 130 tanks and 90 artillery pieces.

F. Some SA-3 and SA-2 SAM equipment has been delivered to Egypt since the cease-fire, but we believe that the bulk of the equipment for the 50 SA-3 and 70 SA-2 firing battalions we estimate are now in that country arrived before the cease-fire.

G. The SA-2 system in Syria was also expanded during 1970 from one to ten firing sites.

IV. The total extent of Soviet military involvement in the Middle East becomes apparent only if we also consider deliveries of equipment to the Soviet forces in Egypt.

A. In March of this year, the Soviets began another series of deliveries of new equipment to their forces in Egypt, including some of their most advanced hardware.

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1. At least three MACH 3 high altitude Foxbat fighters are based at Cairo West airfield, probably for use in a reconnaissance role.

2. Another type of advanced Soviet aircraft--possibly the MACH 2.5 Flagon A interceptor--has been reported in Egypt, but this has not yet been confirmed.

3. In April, the USSR's mobile SA-6 SAM system was identified at Aswan. We have since noted some additional units at a few other key points along the Nile River.

B. Much of the equipment sent to Egypt in the past year and a half had never been provided to non-Communist countries, and could not be operated or maintained by Egyptians.

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